16: Hanks & Hanks E,P-4,5 (1938-1941) 1950
NF6 Blackfoot NF6
Northern Blackfoot
Blackfoot Reserve

crop, the farmer could make a little more by selling it. This induced some to continue through the grim thirties. Those who did were further puzzled in 1941 during the wheat-glut of the first years of World War II when, having long been paid to work their farms, they were paid $4 per acre for not ploughing the land. The white man's ways were totally irrational.

Agriculture could not continue in this way. Something had to be done to increase the chances of a crop and provide a reward for a season's toil. Accordingly, an experimental project of small, intensively cultivated, irrigated plots was started in 1940. Eight young farmers, selected because of their industriousness, were paid $5 per week for groceries while they cultivated their plots under the guidance of a farm instructor. The first year they had crops which brought several hundred dollars to each farmer. Some felt that it was worth-while and were eager to continue. This is probably one answer to agricultural stability on the reserve.

It should be noted that these have been hard years for white farmers too. But the much larger farming units (400 acres and upwards as compared with the usual seeding of 40 acres of wheat for the Indians), more efficient mechanization and some use of irrigation, more flexible financing techniques, and most of all the watchful care of a man who has farming "in his blood" result in greater returns for the white farmer. It is possible that some of the Blackfoot land is properly marginal and should be withdrawn from cultivation at present. Like other areas in Alberta, some strips are blowing and eroding. Certainly the Indians all claim that "the best land was sold in 1911," though they may only perceive the results of skilful farming. In any case the reserve lies squarely in the middle of a belt subject to cataclysmic hail-storms. Whites so situated suffer too, but the larger acreages are not so frequently entirely hailed out. Many whites are also protected by hail insurance. Since these rates are exceedingly high, no Indian carries this coverage.

Without irrigation, agriculture cannot be expected to produce a steady income for the Indians. Although agriculture has increased the income of the Blackfoot more than any other single factor, no man will work long and vigorously with a five-to-one chance of failure unless the return compensates. While war prices have raised the reward, uncertainty makes dry farming of questionable value as the main economic peg. To have a prosperous, contented community requires more than a few hundred dollars every fifth year.